

NOTES ON THE FAT-TAILED MARSUPIAL
MOUSE (*SMINTHOPSIS CRASSICAUDATA*).

BY W. B. ALEXANDER, M.A.

On 17th June, 1922, at Westwood, Central Queensland, I noticed my kitten carrying a small animal in its mouth which, when rescued, proved to be a male of this species. It was somewhat remarkable that it had been caught in the open paddock behind my house in broad daylight. Unfortunately, it had been killed before I rescued it.

A few evenings later the same kitten brought a live specimen into the sitting room and proceeded to play with it. Fortunately, I was able to rescue it before it had been injured, and, subsequently, I kept it alive in a small cage in my room for several weeks. As comparatively little seems to be on record concerning the habits of these small nocturnal marsupials, I have thought it worth while to describe the habits of this individual as far as I could observe them. Like the first specimen, it was an adult male.

The box in which I kept it was lined with rough sods of turf, and during the day it remained concealed amongst the grass. It did not attempt to burrow, but pulled down a few long pieces of grass in such a way as to construct a slight shelter over the hollow in which it slept. About dusk it came out and ran about in its box looking for food. Its progression was effected by a series of short runs, with pauses at short intervals, and it not infrequently made short leaps, springing off its hind legs. It was able to jump on to the edge of the box, a height of about six inches above the turf floor, when the cover was removed.

The cover was of wire-gauze, and when this was in place it not infrequently clambered about on it, hanging from the under surface.

At first it was completely nocturnal, but, after a time when it became tamer, it not infrequently moved about in the day-time, especially during a spell of cold weather when I was unable to find many insects for it and it was presumably hungry.

It readily devoured cockroaches, large moths, and spiders. The cockroaches and spiders were completely eaten, but the wings of the moths were left. It also greedily devoured the white grub of a scarabæid beetle, but did not touch a good-sized earthworm. When hungry it would eat a small amount of beef-fat, but evidently did not care for this diet.

When eating it sat up on its haunches holding the insect in one of its front paws and biting portions out of its victim apparently haphazard, and without first killing it.

Though it was provided with a small tin of water it was never seen to drink, and I do not think water can have been necessary to it. After it was tame I tried holding a little piece of sponge soaked in water and in milk just in front of it, but it would not drink, nor did it lick off drops of water which fell on its fur.

It cleaned its fur in the same manner as a cat, sitting up on its haunches and licking itself, licking its paws and passing them over its head and neck to clean those parts of its fur which were out of reach of its tongue.

Its ordinary call was a low chirrup, and it frequently uttered this sound in the evening when running about in its cage. It would generally make the sound from its hiding place whenever I chirped to it in the day-time. When the cat was playing with it, it uttered a much louder, shriller, chirping sound, but I am glad to say this terrified call was not heard again.

Owing to a scarcity of insects I one evening introduced into its cage a large crab-spider with a breadth of some five inches across the legs. The mouse had killed and eaten a smaller specimen of the same kind, measuring from three and a-half to four inches across, but next morning the large spider was still unharmed in the cage. I removed it and, on hunting for the mouse found it in its corner alive but shivering, the trembling being especially apparent in its tail. Next day it died, and I have little doubt that its death was caused by the poisonous bite of the spider.

I am indebted to Mr. H. A. Longman, Director of the Queensland Museum, for identifying the species.
